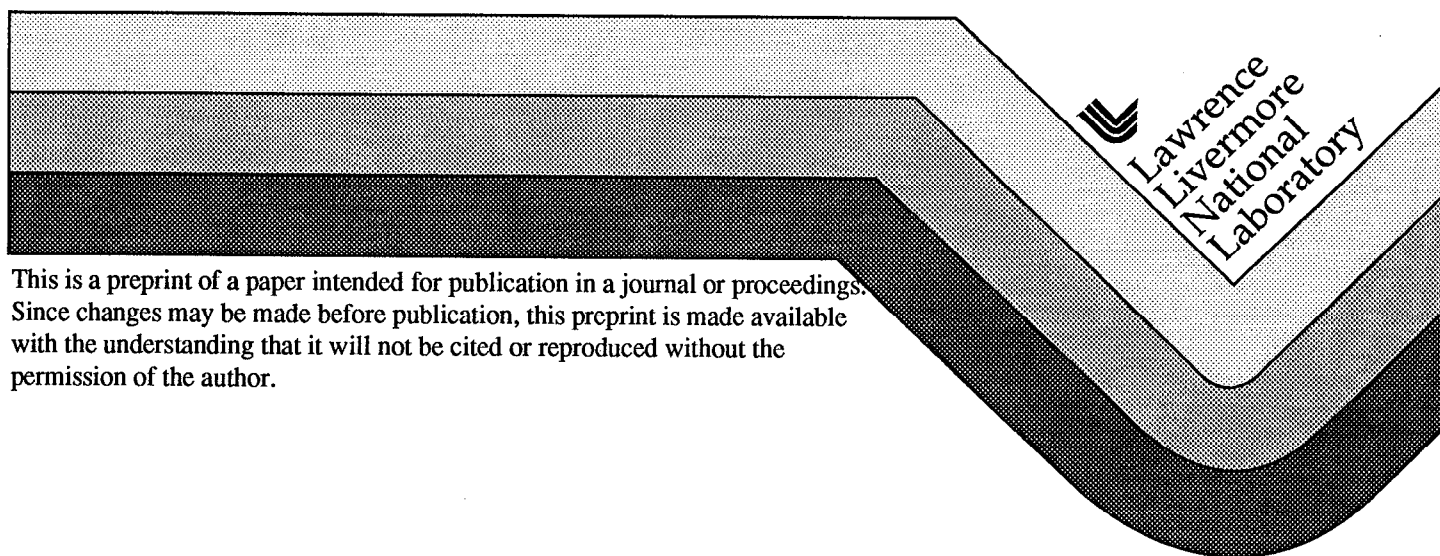


## Giving Effective Poster Presentations

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# **GIVING EFFECTIVE POSTER PRESENTATIONS**

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## The Key to Giving An Effective Poster Session

Media research has determined that the average viewer has a 30 second attention span. This definitely applies to the casual wanderer at a poster session. At a poster session, you have three seconds to get the attention of a passerby—and 30 seconds to get your message across.

Here is another fact for you to mull over. About 80 percent of the information that we receive comes through our eyes. So, the key to getting your message across at a poster session is to keep the words and graphics clear, concise, and eye-catching. In the next few pages, I will tell you how to do that.

### **Know your audience**

Your first step is to determine who your audience will be. By audience, I refer to the people passing by your poster area. Are they

- project associates,
- technical professionals working on a similar technology or project,
- company representatives looking for collaborative agreements, or
- Jane Q Public.

### **Be clear**

How often have you become disinterested in a poster session because the terms used were beyond your understanding?

Write your message in a way that relates to the interests of your audience. Choose words and images appropriate to their level of understanding. What would interest a company representative the most? What would be the benefit of your technology to the average person walking by? Write your message with clarity—use clear and

simple language that the viewer will understand. Even someone who is knowledgeable about a particular technology will appreciate your message when it is easily and quickly understood. Do not use acronyms or local jargon that are not used by your audience.

Keep the main points of your message clear and concise, and pertinent to your message. That way, passersby or browsers can easily scan your poster for what interests them. Some examples of clear communication of technology:

- Our process immediately and accurately detects propellant stabilizer problems.
- This laser safely cuts metals and explosives with surgical precision.

Be prepared to talk about your subject in more detail on a one-to-one basis at a level the interested person will understand. Handouts can be used to expand on your subject.

### **Be concise**

How many times have you seen a poster presentation that was so filled with information that you couldn't figure out what the presenter was trying to say?

Reduce your message to one sentence by focusing on one main point that best describes your message, concept, premise or theme. Expand your message with two to three meaty statements about the benefits of your technology. Use a coherent sequence of main points. And write for the user. Here are examples of benefit statements:

- The laser's short pulses produce minimal heat while cutting materials.
- This portable analysis system fits into a briefcase.
- Our process is the best alternative to open detonation of explosives.

Be creative. Use descriptive words your viewer will remember. But, keep in mind your objective—to get your message across succinctly.

Do not overwhelm your audience. Use limited text—remember, they have a 30 second attention span. There is also the factor of time constraint. With so many poster

sessions for browsers to view, or to become engaged in, you have only a few moments to *get your point across*. No matter how complex your subject, it is to your benefit and to the benefit of your audience to keep the message simple and concise. You want to inform your viewers with the least amount of text.

### **Create eye-catching posters**

If you are exhibiting outside of your workplace, the first requisite is to put your company or institutional name and logo where it can be easily seen.

Next, you need to use readable text. There has been much discussion on the appropriate type size and style for readability. Through my experience and examination, here are some rules of thumb. One viewer standing close to read small text will block the view for others; therefore, type should be readable from a distance of 8 to 16 feet. The minimum type size for a viewing distance of 8 feet, such as at a poster session, would be three-eighths inch, or approximately 38 points (points are the measurement used by typographers). At 16 feet, the type size needs to be one-half inch (50 points) to three-quarters inch (75 points). One-inch type (100 points) can be read at 30 feet (see attachments). These specifications assume that a person has 20/20 vision, with or without glasses or contacts.

A common standard used in the Technical Information Department at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory is to make titles 72 point type and subtitles or call-outs 54 point type.

Sans serif type faces (meaning without serifs) are preferable. Serifs are short cross-lines that finish off a letter, such as seen with this M. Largest type can be used for a title or headline, which tells the viewer the subject of the presentation or acts as a grabber. Medium-sized type can be used for the main points of your message. Smaller type is used for captions or for more detailed information. Keep the text to a minimum. The text should be considered a lead-in to discussion and should get your message out

to anyone not wanting to stop and talk.

The space between lines, known as the leading, should be enough that descenders (bottoms of letters, such as “y” or “g”) do not touch or overlap the ascenders (tops of letters, such as “h” and “b”) of the next line. Capital letters in continuous text (THIS IS AN EXAMPLE) reduces the speed of reading. However, capitals can be read more easily from a distance, suggesting that it is fine to use them in short, short titles.

Choose a graphic (or graphics) that best expresses your message, concept, premise, or theme. This can be a professionally created chart or illustration, or an uncluttered, sharp-contrast photograph. Use one to three large graphics that will be attractive as well as informative, and that may evoke questions that you will answer. It is common to place a person or familiar object in a photograph to show scale. Use concise captions. Avoid equations; this type of information should be addressed in handouts. Graphs should have bold lines in order to be readable at a distance. Sequence of text and graphics should follow a logical order. And, do not use items with glossy surfaces that will reflect the room lighting and cause them to be unreadable.

One more point. With technology available, it is not necessary to ‘post’ several different pieces of paper, photos, and so on. You can incorporate all information into one electronic file to be printed on a single sheet of any required size, and mounted for sturdiness.

## **Summary**

Giving an effective poster presentation can be easy and rewarding with attention to a few proven concepts. Define your audience. Keep the words and graphics clear, concise, and eye-catching. Remember, you have three seconds to attract attention and 30 seconds to get your message across.

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Font: Helvetica Regular

Readability 3/8" (37.5 pts)

Readability 1/2" (50 pts)

Readability 3/4" (75pts)

Readability 1" (100 pts)

**Font: Helvetica Bold**

**Readability** 3/8" (37.5 pts)

**Readability** 1/2" (50 pts)

**Readability** 3/4" (75pts)

**Readability** 1" (100 pts)